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Morals

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THE foundation of moral conditions is the social situation. This has been apparent to a much greater degree since the war than formerly. Hunger has shown its tremendous effects on business affairs and life. Many people who formerly knew nothing of the injurious effects of evil social conditions experienced in their own person the degenerating influence of want during the war.

DEGENERATING EFFECT OF FOOD-SHORTAGE

Undoubtedly, the situation has improved in this respect during the last year. It is noticeably true that those who have money have been able to purchase foreign food at high prices. On the other hand, it is still difficult for the poor people to acquire even comparatively sufficient nourishment, quite aside from the fact that the results of hunger are still quite evident and probably will be for years. This is especially true of the effects which the food blockade had upon the children; thousands of children are already suffering from tuberculosis. Tuberculosis mortality is still three times as great as in the period before the war.

It is therefore not surprising that, in addition to hunger, the fear of hunger plays an important part in the emotional life of the people. The danger exists that in a limited time Germany will not be able to buy from foreign countries the food-products which it needs for the maintenance of its population. Germany produces only two-thirds of its necessary nourish-

ment; the remaining third can naturally be imported only if its money value represents the necessary billions. Since, however, the industrial exportation of Germany is being utilized almost entirely for the obligated war indemnity deliveries, the possibility of sufficient payment scarcely exists at present. Ever since the meeting at Spa, German exchange has been falling constantly, so that in a not far distant future the inability of Germany to pay will become a fact.

When the people have nothing more to eat, no government can maintain itself in peace times. The instability of general conditions which exists because of the food shortage gives rise to the situation that a constant change in the guidance of German affairs must take place. The stronger the pressure which foreign nations exert in carrying out the impossible conditions of Versailles, the larger the number of the German people who will be forced out of healthy circumstances. It is just as if one were to compare this pressure of the conditions of Versailles to an enormous press which was being forced down upon the German people; the deeper this press is let down, the more groups and divisions of the people are pressed out at the sides and are driven into an opposition against any permanent governmental system. If the pressure is increased further, the moment must come in which so-called bolshevism gains control. No one can prophesy what that would mean for Germany, but this much is certain, that under such conditions, the demands of foreign countries could not be

satisfied, nor would bread be at hand for the German people themselves.

RESTORATION OF A WILL TO WORK

If it is true that the foundation of all morals is a certain courage to live, then this prerequisite for healthy morals is at present lacking in Germany. The actual leaders of the people certainly feel that they ought to encourage the masses, but they themselves lack the faith in the honesty of comforting counsel. As far as the situation at present is concerned, under the operation of the document of Versailles, a vital development in the inner life of Germany can not be hoped for. The little groups which gather together in order to reconstruct do so without any firm hope. Only certain youthful groups, *i.e.*, those who do not get a general view of the situation, are optimistic. They build their Utopias as cheerfully as before—that is the prerogative of youth. They do not realize that, so far as the circumstances now are concerned, the structure must cave in after a short time or be swept away. The same is naturally true of those circles of workers who do not have a power of judgment sufficient to enable them to evaluate correctly the general possibilities of economic and social questions.

All of us who experienced the collapse of Germany stand in amazement before the forces which have reasserted themselves in spite of the pessimism of all intellectuals after the experience of two years of revolution. The order which had so severely broken up in the first revolution-year has been restored again to a great extent, although it must naturally continue to stand the test which is to be expected with every new rising of the destitute people. The old will to work has been almost completely restored; everywhere that work is going on, earners are working

cheerfully, beyond the eight-hour day; and even if not as much is produced as before the war, nevertheless a consistent increase in production is noticeable. A difference as against former times is the fact that the workers demand wages without consideration of the productive ability of their industry. Generally speaking, however, one is able to say that because of the more self-conscious bearing and the greater power of the workers, the certainty of productive labor is not the same as in former times. The discipline of the work is no longer the same, although the people on the whole have recovered their will to work.

A SPIRIT OF LOYALTY NEEDED

It is a sad thing to observe that the inclination for genuinely sound productivity which had already died out before the war among the workers has not yet begun to reawaken. Unfortunately, the lack of interest in the business to which the individual belongs has been extended to the entire commercial life. How seldom does one find that the employees represent with all their power the interests of their chief in the manner in which they practically always did previously. In this respect also the endangering of morals has come from above. Since it has become a universal practice in the business world to take advantage of others and to be tricky, "*schieben*," as we learned to say during the war, this trait of an unrighteous exploitation of one's position has also been transferred to the groups of employees. Perhaps an improvement may be noted in this respect also, but generally speaking the confidence in the business world of the large cities has vanished. Wherever it is a question of business matters, the slogan is for everyone to guard his own interests and look out for himself.

Unfortunately, this insecurity has also penetrated into the official circles. If the old Prussia had one title to honor, it was the absolute incorruptibility and single-mindedness of its officials. Since, during the war, certain classes who lacked these old traditions were drawn into official positions in a constantly increasing degree, the complexion of our officials has become entirely different. The parliamentary ministers doubtless introduced many suggestive innovations into their offices; at the same time, however, the *Erzbergerei* has become a lamentable far-reaching symptom of public life. Not only is the Prussian nobility withdrawing from official life in a constantly increasing degree—it has disappeared almost entirely from the army, as far as an army still exists—but also the bourgeois families of officials have lost their pleasure in coöperating. We are now paying for the fact that not more training in coöperation was introduced into the socialistic circles by the former ruling classes. Those officials who came from the social-democratic parties are

provided in more cases with neither the necessary theoretical preparation nor the other traditions, which have proved themselves indispensable for a good execution of public offices in all nations.

In spite of this it can not be denied that a large part of the hopes which we place in the future, in spite of everything, rests upon the combination of a reawakening of the old spirit of duty and loyalty with the new powers of socialism. When a socialistic idealism comes into being in Germany, when the feeling for the entire mass of people is combined with the ethical-religious forces, which heretofore confined themselves to personal piety, then indeed the German contribution to the reconstruction of the world must take place in this way. But this contribution can not be made if the foreign nations which are at present combining their economic pressure on Germany do not change their attitude. The eyes of all people who are striving for and hope for an improvement along ethical lines are focused upon the moral forces of America.